

Connecticut Alliance of YMCAs

Testimony before the Select Committee on Children

HB 5146 – Concerning Criminal Background Checks of camp employees who transport children with special needs.
HB 5199 – Concerning Criminal Background Checks of camp employees.

My name is Denise Learned. I am the Executive Director of Camp Hazen YMCA, one of five YMCA resident camps that operate in the state of Connecticut. There are other resident camps in the state operated by private groups, as well as Boys and Girl Scouts and similar organizations. While the issues surrounding background checks are similar for both day camps and resident camps, there are some differences which I would like to highlight. But, before I do that, let me affirm, like the prior two speakers, that I support the requirement that background checks be mandatory for all camps.

The prior two speakers spoke of the need and the administrative issues surrounding background checks. I would like to inform you of the status of YMCA background checks and then explain the difference between resident and day camp operations, that you may wish to take into consideration.

First, one question that comes to mind relates to who will be covered by this legislation? Since certain camps operated by municipalities and school districts do not fall under normal camp licensing requirements, you should consider whether this proposed requirement is aimed at ALL camps, or only those licensed by the State of Department of Public Health.

Second, there are some YMCAs that operate summer resident camp programs, but the camp is located in another state. I presume the state regulations where the camp is located will apply?

Third, some basic facts:

Do all YMCAs currently require background checks on the camp employees as a matter of best practice? The answer is YES. Based on a recent survey with all YMCAs operating in the state, we found no YMCA that is not already doing this type of check. Many YMCAs conduct background checks on ALL employees and volunteers who work with children such as CCC YMCA, Northwest, Darien, Greenwich, etc.

What is the method used to conduct these background checks? There are many means and methods used by local YMCAs. None limit their background checks to criminal history only. Most are "soup to nuts". The most frequently used services are:

- YMCAs payroll service providers such as ADP Avert (2)
- Private providers such as: Choice Point - Volunteers, Arresthistory.com, Hire Right (3), Volunteer Select, Research Services LLC (a CT based company), Verifirst, National Background Investigations.

Do YMCAs conduct state or national searches. The answer is both. Most YMCAs (CCC Y, Hartford, Darien, Camp Hazen, Camp Mohawk) conduct both a state and national data base searches. Some also conduct county searches for

every county in which an employee has lived since turning age 18. Most also check the state Sexual Offender Registry as well. There are only two YMCAs that limit their searches to state data bases only.

What is the cost? It varies based on the volume of checks that are done and the extensiveness of the background check that is requested. Thus, your legislation should not add to this cost, but rather recognize that systems are in place currently, and those systems should be recognized as qualifying for the state background check requirement, so as not to create increased or duplicative administrative burdens or costs. The fees per person range from \$ 7 to \$ 9 per search all the way up to \$ 60 or \$ 70/search.

Fourth, let me summarize some basic do's and don'ts:

- DO be prepared for the volume of requests that will come in just before summer.
- DO NOT make it impossible for people who are required to get the background check to conduct it (for example, volunteer chaperones of groups attending a camp but the chaperones are with a group that is not a licensed camp themselves and the camp is not allowed to conduct the background checks on their behalf). Thus, using a private service provider is preferred.
- DO NOT set things up in such a way that background check results are available on line but then disappear after a few days – nightmare for busy camp directors with bad internet connections in June.
- DO set up a system that accesses data from as many states as will share their data,
- DO make it clear if some states are not included so camp directors know under what circumstances they must conduct an additional background check for a camp counselor who comes from a state that does not share data.

Let me take a moment to talk about resident camps. One of the first issues that needs to be considered is what to do about international staff. Most YMCA resident camps believe a child's experience is enhanced by interaction with International Camp Counselors. However, the process for their background checks is different. State policy and administrative regulations need to take into consideration the process and time frame needed to conduct these background checks. It is possible, just different.

For more information on this topic, contact:

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